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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [CH](#) [ZI](#) [SF](#)
SUBJECT: PRC SCHOLARS SAY CHINESE GOVERNMENT CAUTIOUSLY
DISTANCING ITSELF FROM ZIMBABWE'S MUGABE

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.
4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Chinese Government has distanced itself from Zimbabwean President Mugabe but will not pressure him to step down unless the South African Development Community (SADC) or African Union (AU) calls for his resignation, Chinese scholars recently told PolOff. The scholars agreed that China will continue to abide by its policy of "non-interference" but use "quiet pressure" to encourage Mugabe to share power with the opposition. China will channel its food aid through the UN World Food Program because of concerns of rampant corruption in the Mugabe Government, according to one scholar. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Between December 30 and January 13, PolOff discussed the situation in Zimbabwe with Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Africa Studies Director He Wenping, CASS Center for Southern Africa Studies Director Yang Lihua and Ministry of State Security-affiliated China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) Institute of Asia and Africa Studies Deputy Director Xu Weizhong.

China Distancing Itself from Mugabe...

¶3. (C) CASS's He Wenping noted a gradual shift in China's policy toward Zimbabwe in 2008, from actively supporting Mugabe's Government to calling for a national unity government and pushing Mugabe to negotiate with the opposition. She said she recently attended a meeting in Beijing where China's Ambassador to Zimbabwe said China's food assistance to Zimbabwe, which was first announced by the MFA in December, will go through the UN World Food Program rather than being channeled through the "corrupt government." She interpreted this decision as a sign that the Chinese Government has lost faith in Mugabe and is concerned about being viewed as a supporter of his regime.

...But Maintaining a Cautious Approach

¶4. (C) While acknowledging Mugabe's role in causing the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, scholars agreed that China will continue its cautious approach. CASS's Yang Lihua said China is putting "quiet pressure" on Mugabe to compromise but is concerned that social chaos will ensue if Mugabe is forced from power. CASS's He noted that China's policy of non-interference and its long friendship with the Mugabe Government make it "impossible" at this point for China to call for his resignation. CICIR's Xu Weizhong said China maintains "normal state-to-state relations" with Zimbabwe but does not "support" Mugabe. He argued that China will continue to exercise "strategic patience" and abide by its policy of non-interference, carefully avoiding actions or statements that would be seen by Africans as "imposing on

them" or showing a "condescending attitude."

South Africa is Key

15. (C) CASS's He Wenping stated that China will watch closely South Africa, the country that China sees as the key player on this issue. Only if South Africa and the AU call for Mugabe to step down will China consider following suit, a scenario she said is unlikely given South Africa's current leadership. CASS's Yang Li Hua separately concurred that China's consistent principle is to support the AU and SADC position. Arguing that China's influence on Mugabe is limited, she stressed that only pressure from within Zimbabwe and from regional leaders such as South Africa could lead Mugabe to step down.
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